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GRAMMATICAL CONCEPTS AND THEIR NAMES

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In his lecture on *The Educational Value of the Natural History Sciences* Huxley remarks on the difference between a popular concept and a scientific one. Popular concepts classify things by their felt likeness to typical cases; scientific concepts refer them to definitions. Ask any man "to define a beast from a reptile, and he cannot do it; but he says, 'things like a cow or a horse are beasts, and things like a frog or a lizard are reptiles.'" The scientist, on the other hand, aims at a rigorous description of *reptilia* which shall exclude such *amphibia* as fall within the loose notion "reptile." To him "classification by type is simply an acknowledgment of ignorance and a temporary device."

These words a grammarian reads with the disquieting reflection that some of his staple terms do nothing more nor less than classify by type. When, in *gentleman usher, the foul and the fair, ask that it shall appear*, he calls *gentleman* a "noun," *foul* and *fair* "adjectives," and *shall* a "subjunctive" use, he refers not to a logical definition of "subjunctive," "adjective," or "noun," but to a partial likeness between the locutions here and *typical* locutions, in which the words take these labels by virtue of concurring features of meaning, of sentence-function, and of form. The trouble with a label derived from typical instances is that it tells nothing very *certain* about any given instance. Hearing a given word called a "verb," I *may* be right in understanding that it shows all three verb-features: a notion of occurrence, predicative function, and a form answering to these sense-aspects. It may, however, be a non-typical verb, showing but one or two of these features. Indeed, we here have to do with four aspects of meaning, of which all may appear in one word, or two or more may divide their expression between words of a verb-phrase. The term "verb," therefore, applies to any word-form of a series ascending in sense-complexity about as follows:

TYPES OF VERB FORM

Verb Meaning	1. The fact and mood of predication	} Pure copula (twice 2 is 4)	} Auxiliary (<i>would</i> write)	} Semi-notional (<i>become, seem, render</i>)	} Typical verb (<i>writes</i>)
	2. Tense				
	3. A general category as of cause, transition, etc. (<i>en-slave, magnify, christian-ize</i>)		} Absolute notional form (<i>writing</i>)		
	4. The kernel idea (<i>writ-, verv-</i>)				

To label a "verb" with any regard to these distinctions we must awkwardly piece out the term: "auxiliary verb," "periphrastic verb," "verb of incomplete predication." And with distinctions of syntax we meet fresh trouble in talking unequivocally. To classify an English word uniting verb meaning with noun function we must hesitate between three terms: "infinitive," "gerund," "supine"—all terms that apply *typically* to verb-forms in Latin.¹

The makeshifts to which such a nomenclature puts us naturally prompt the question whether the modern grammarian should not scrutinize words for himself, take a clean slate, and set about devising labels that shall satisfy the "scientist." Words are complexes offering three features for classification: (1) content, or independent meaning, (2) function, or use in the sentence, and (3) form. And each of these features presents a workable set of categories. Thus as to content a word means either a thing, or an attribute of quality, behavior, or relation; and its meaning is either descriptive, as in common nouns and notional adjectives, verbs, and adverbs, or simply designative, as in proper nouns and demonstratives. Through this grouping will of course run cross-divisions of "modal content": number, tense, degree. As to function, a word is either (1) a sentence-word (interjection, vocative, imperative); (2) a particle (preposition, auxiliary, conjunction), *marking* sentence-relation for notional words that it presupposes; or (3) a term of syntax, *bearing* the relation—subject, predicate, attributive, or adverbial. As to form, a word may take either mutation or affixes, these being either flecational, expressing sentence-relations directly, or as in—*slav-ery, en-slave*—derivative,

¹ In English, lacking so frequently the formal marks, we pretend to parse "by function only"; but of course we can do nothing of the kind with terms which, resting on content and form as well, oblige us to talk of "*nouns* used attributively," of "*adjectives* used substantively," etc.

making certain sentence-relations forefelt by the word's syntactic habit.¹

It is evident that no label really tells what "part of speech" a word is, unless it tells us what category it answers to under each of these three headings. The term, that is, should show three elements, designating classes respectively of content, of function, and of form. Where, as often in English, distinctive form is lacking, the third element would of course be dropped. An ideal nomenclature for words would then resemble that for chemical complexes. Thus in

sub-carbon-ate
hypo-sulph-ite
hypo-chlor-ous
per-chlor-ic
chlor-ide
nitr-ate

prefixes, stems, and suffixes refer to three different sets of categories, so that any term varies flexibly in order to apply throughout to the particular complex under view; whereas a term like "adjective" points rigidly to the typical complex, and in particular applications must get part of its reference contradicted, as when we say it is "used substantively." One need but contrast with these terms from chemistry our "preposition," "auxiliary verb," "predicate adjective," "objective complement"—labels that tell little without running to tedious lengths—to realize that terms give a maximum of information for the speech-material used, only when their stems and affixes are codified.²

¹ The question will here rise: When are we dealing with different forms of the same word, when with different words? For we have to do (1) with roots + affixes, as in *box-ing*, *box-es*; (2) with total changes, as between *I*, *me*; *am*, *be*; and (3) with distinctions conveyed by the context, as in *my box of books*, *I box my books*, *a box factory*.

² A reform so radical as the one here suggested may not seem "within the range of practical politics," but it would not be without precedent. The nomenclature for igneous rocks having grown by mere otiose assent around a clumsy traditional system, four American petrographers published in 1903 a brand new nomenclature, based on quantitative chemical analysis, and on a codifying of the syllables composing their terms. This system, the *Quantitative Classification of Igneous Rocks*, had in 1909, gained such currency as to command its inclusion in *Webster's New International Dictionary* (article "petrography").

The new names, however, might easily achieve a specious precision with an actual loss of distinctions that the old type-names conserve. If behind "noun," "adjective," "verb," we have *conceptual* types, to which as abstract patterns our ways of thinking conform—just as perceived objects conform to the geometrical types "sphere," "cone," "rectangle," etc.—we cannot treat these terms as mere grammarian's figments. So far as they answer to the notions "thing," "quality," "act," they reflect a metaphysic native to the mind, which resolves the fleeting world into these primordial categories.¹ But they do not so answer completely. Abstract nouns are not names of "things," nor are such verbs as *candēre*, *lie*, *shine*, *remain* clearly names of "acts." Inflected speech, therefore, extends its types of word-form beyond what might seem called for by the kinds of idea. Since goodness is not a "thing," the noun-forms *bonitas*, *bonitatem* need never have appeared, if the adjective-forms *bonum*, *bonī*, *bona* had—like Chinese *hao*—served in syntax for both *goodness* and *good*. If, then, as Sweet says, "inflection is practically nothing but a device for turning a noun into an adjective or adverb,"² do we understand *vir tantā bonitate*, *bellī gloria* as identical in sense with *vir tam bonus* and *gloria bellica*? Or does an ideal distinction inhere in noun and adjective as such? Such questions must get answers before we can venture upon classifying words with names that stamp express implications between their content and function, and their form.

If every *systematic* item in words has import, then something of import must attach to the suffixes (as in *great-ness*, *great-ly*) by which a given notion is conformed to more than one cardinal part of speech. Is this an import purely of function, or of ideal form, or of value? According to Van Ginneken it is one of value. Our word categories, he says,³ take their rise in existential judgments, and reflect degrees and kinds of conviction. Verb and noun answer to the distinction of absolute and relative existence; noun and adjective, to that of real and potential. Stated thus baldly

¹ See H. Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, pp. 325–28.

² *Philolog. Soc. Trans.*, 1875–76, p. 493.

³ Jac. Van Ginneken, *Principes de linguistique psychologique*, Pt. 1.

his view may command less respect than it deserves; but it seems to read into grammar values that could be felt only in mature reasoning. Such categories as "absolute" and "relative" arise not in the mind's spontaneous reaction upon what is before it, but in a reflective *interpretation* of experience. They presuppose an interest too sophisticated to have been operative in the early days of speech. A truer view is perhaps that of Sechehaye,¹ according to whom noun, adjective, verb, and adverb show "thing," "quality," "act," and "manner," as *categories of the imagination*, to which all ideas are assimilated. Thus where an idea of quality takes noun-forms (*boni-tās, great-ness*) it is because when thought in relations that are associated with ideas of things, quality is expressed *under the aspect of a thing*. Hence *belli gloria, man of such goodness* have not the same meaning as *gloria bellica, so good a man*, and grammatical terms that would here point to content must recognize the formal types, "noun," "adjective," etc., as imposing upon the root-notion *ideal categories of content* that differ from its logical category.

Besides content and function, words carry a third kind of import, springing from the *speaker's concern* with what he says. With this import we reach beyond the expressive scope of detached words to that of sentences. Sentences and clauses take in predication a sort of psychic stress, marking their *relevance* to the purposive concern that prompts their utterance. Where this concern makes question of verb-form, we talk of *mood*, but some purpose always energizes the sentence-thought, whether it takes expression in mood or otherwise. A "mood-force," answering to some category of the will, inheres in sentence and clause as such: it is simply sentence-value considered with reference to its *kind*. Its varieties appear in the downright attitude of "telling," in the non-committal one of "assuming," in the attitudes of asking, commanding, and exclaiming. Here, then, is a conception apart from which the terms "sentence" and "mood" remain vague. In the "classes of sentence"—assertive, interrogative, imperative, exclamative—grammar recognizes certain types of formula expressive of this modal purport, but it attempts no valid definition of "sentence"

¹ Ch. A. Sechehaye, *Programme et méthodes de la linguistique théorique*, p. 238.

in terms thereof, and it recognizes the purport as "modal" only in verbs. Mood-force, however, is the dynamic principle in every sentence, as against its static meaning;¹ and it may be conveyed by word-order, (*is he good? how good he is!*) or by special modal adverbs (*perhaps, of course*, etc.).² As to sentence-value, then, we have three conceptions to keep distinct: (1) "modal force," which coincides with (2) logical "modality," only when narrowed to a concern with status as regards fact; and (3) "mood," or aspect of verb-form expressing modal force.

Sentence-value offers yet another set of distinctions. The sentence stands to word or phrase as judgment to concept, and since a concept sums within itself the work of its constitutive judgments, it carries their predication implicitly. Where the concept-name is a single word (*man, good, sinner*) this predicative force seems at zero or wholly latent, and the concept is felt as inert matter-for-thought. But the analytic matching of concepts with words must proceed largely in terms of improvised "propositional names"³ (*man talking, good weather, sin against God*), which show predication in various degrees of articulateness. An amplified sentence, therefore, discloses (1) the explicit predication that imparts its sentence-status as a whole; (2) explicit but subordinate predications; and (3) nearly or quite implicit predications.

Sentence-value, then, lies in the speaker's concern with his utterance. Modal force has its distinctions in the *nature* of that concern; predicative force, in its *degree of immediacy*. The differences of force between a clause, an appositive phrase, and an attributive adjective are differences that maintain within the sentence an adjustment of ideas answering to perspective. Insensibility to its gradations is answerable for depressing faults in a

¹ See my *Grammar and Thinking* (Putnam, 1912), pp. 26-29, 177-78.

² Grammar should take more precise account of the difference in adverbial terms between such as modify the whole prediction (*she doubtless smiled*), and such as modify only its notional content (*she smiled cordially*). The former really modifies the copula implied in the verb. A conditional clause has a like effect. In *if you are right, I am wrong*, the if-clause is not a modifier of *wrong*; but its truth is conveyed as standing in a special relation to the other clause's truth. We might, almost, call it a "modal adverbial" clause.

³ Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Mathematics*, I, 49 f.

pupil's writing—for the lack of saliency in sense-items most directly relevant, for the flatness of the whole thing: all qualifications lying, as it were, in the same plane, with nothing focalized between the two extremes of unstressed attributives and crassly explicit clauses.

Grammar therefore should name clauses and clause-equivalents in *degrees of "predicative force"* about as follows:¹

1. CO-CLAUSE (co-ordinate with main clause):

He must increase: I must decrease.

God made the country, and man made the town.

2. SUB-CLAUSE:

Since he must increase, I must decrease.

He who hesitates is lost. We believe *he was a traitor*.

When John had been disposed of, the class began work.

3. ABSOLUTE PHRASE OR ABRIDGED CLAUSE:

John disposed of, the class began work.

The vote was carried, *only three dissenting*.

I shall be present, *weather permitting*.

The order is for surrender, *officers to keep their side-arms*.

If guilty, he shall die. *When in London*, buy cravats. Believe *him to be a traitor*.

4. APPOSITIVE PHRASE OR WORD:

Ready and determined, Sulla watched their approach.

Hearing his name, Samuel rose.

Sulla, *victor*, now offered peace.

He owned himself *beaten*.

ATTRIBUTIVE PHRASE OR WORD:

Guilty soul; *the listening* Samuel; man *of sin*; *box* kite.

Two reflections seem pressed home by this probing among grammatical concepts. One is that language itself classifies by type, patterning its forms not on general definitions but on immediate analogies, and the grammarian has the peculiar task of applying the logic of science to a matter already wrought upon by this native logic. The other is that choice among grammatical terms is no mere matter of names; for the terms commit us to definite views of grammatical facts.

¹I have profited by an effective tabular scheme for "clause-reduction" by Associate Professor Josephine M. Burnham of Wellesley.